3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

When things were quiet members of a band would have their families and herds with them and live in their own tents, but when pressed they left their women and children and beasts in the tents of the submitted population and the only non-combatants in their camps would then be a few female cooks. Before the end of the war many of the Patriots, including Sidi 'Umar, had sent their families to Egypt so that they could act more freely.

There was also a general administration for all the bands and this came directly under Sidi 'Umar. They maintained inter-communication and worked to a common strategy. Guerrilla headquarters had also to arrange for the collection of a tithe from the entire population to help pay for the expenses of the campaign. Throughout the war Sidi 'Umar's tax-collectors were taking tithes from the submitted population, not always without trouble, and were giving written receipts for the payments. The tithe paid by each tribe went to support its own band. Sidi 'Umar had also to arrange for caravans to bring supplies from Egypt, and to supervise their distribution to the armed forces and the payment of customs dues on what went to the civilian population. Sidi 'Umar also kept up correspondence with Sayyid Idris and Sanusi elements and sympathizers in Egypt.

The guerrilla bands were in constant contact with the enemy. One of the most striking features of the campaign was the frequency of the fighting. At some point or other on the plateau a skirmish or larger engagement took place every few days for nearly nine years during the spring and summer months. In the account of the campaign which follows I mention but few of these fights, those which had exceptional importance for the campaign as a whole or as examples of the scale of the fighting. The few mentioned are therefore no indication of the amount of fighting. Its frequency may be judged by Gen. Graziani's statement that in the final year of the war, when resistance, compared with earlier years, was feeble and sporadic, there took place 53 engagements (*combattimenti*) and 210 skirmishes (*conflitti*).[1]

This incessant fighting cannot, as I have already said, be described in the language of text-book logistics in terms of manœuvring, objectives, and battles. Indeed, the Italians had

[1] *Rivista delle Colonie Italiane*, vol. vi (I), 1932, pp. 52–3.

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

to adapt themselves to the kind of fighting which seldom fails to upset the orthodox military mind. Text-book strategy does not apply to an enemy who wanders at will over a country with which he is familiar from birth, among a friendly people ready to provide him with exact intelligence, and in small mobile bands; and whose strategy is little more than the guerrilla imperatives—strike suddenly, strike incessantly, strike hard, get out quick. An army can only be manœuvred to inflict defeats on the enemy and to destroy his armed forces when he has an opposing army which can be brought to decisive engagements. The Italians were fighting a people, not an army, and a people can only be defeated by total imprisonment or extermination.

If the Bedouin had had anything which could clearly have been isolated as 'armed forces', these could easily have been destroyed by Italian superiority in men and machines. But they had nothing which could, properly speaking, be called an army, and they had no lines which could be pierced or turned and no strongholds which could be taken or in which troops could be contained. Against Bedouin it was of little profit to occupy towns and villages, for they retired to less accessible regions or circulated gaily between the Italian garrisons. Control of the roads and ports was also of little benefit. Roads were meaningless to the Bedouin and they were independent of overseas trade since they could live on the country for immediate necessities and obtain from Egypt what few additional supplies they required to carry on the war. To ease the supply problem, as well as to be of maximum nuisance to the Italian garrisons and convoys, the guerrilla bands were kept as small and mobile as possible. Their smallness and mobility confused the slow and unwieldy Italian columns. If the columns split up they were liable to be surrounded by concerted action of the bands and annihilated, whereas if they kept together, the cost of formation was the loss of speed and surprise. There seemed to be no enemy forces to fight, yet attack was incessant. There were no fixed points of opposition. It was indefinite and disseminated.

Even when contact could be established with the guerrilla bands and they could be defeated, as they often were, their defeat could not be turned into more than a temporary rout, for there was no highly organized tactical system to be upset,

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

spotted by planes and either bombed or machine-gunned from the air or destroyed by armoured cars.

As a result of the operations in 1924 and the spring of 1925 the Bedouin bands were pressed eastwards away from the main Italian bases at Banghazi and al-Marj. However, Italian control of much of the country from which they claimed to have driven the Patriots was less secure than the disposition of their advance posts suggests, for the guerrilla bands continued to operate in it. Nevertheless they were now able to mass men in these posts in such numbers, and to equip and supply them so well, that a Patriot attack on them had small chance of success. Sidi 'Umar had therefore to fall back on such operations as could be conducted by his small guerrilla bands, now deprived of any secure bases, mostly in and from the thick forest country to the south of the watershed between Marawa and al-Qaiqab and in the broken country of the Wadi al-Kuf area, where they had protection from air-reconnaissance and mechanized patrols and the advantage of superior intelligence and knowledge of the terrain.

The Italians had to adapt their tactics anew to the kind of warfare most favourable to the enemy. Gen. Mombelli's new operational plan was to establish a line of forts to act as *perni di manovra* from which the whole country could be ceaselessly patrolled to prevent the Patriot bands from massing against any point, to destroy their herds and crops, and to keep them constantly on the run. The main concentrations for these operations were al-Abyar, al-Marj, and Shahhat. The plan at first appeared to give the desired results but as time went on it gave less satisfaction. It was found that while it allowed the troops greater freedom of movement it was they, and not the Patriots, whose strength was worn out and finally exhausted. The Bedouin countered the new measures by attacking the smaller Italian patrols and dispersing before the larger. They solved the supply problem by living on the country, exacting food from the submitted sections, in whose country they also quartered their families, sowed their crops, and pastured their herds, so that the Italian patrols did not know what belonged to the *sottomessi* and what to the *ribelli* and they could only destroy the crops and beasts of the Patriots if they destroyed at the same time the crops and beasts of the quiescent part of

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

*175 *648 *795 to take over the command, Sidi 'Umar had, in spite of almost invariable defeats, kept the initiative. Mobility, knowledge of the country, and daring still enabled his men, worn out though they were by long years of hardship and hunger, to strike where they would, keeping Italian posts, patrols, and convoys always on the alert. Graziani now closed on them from both the plateau and the steppe country to the south. All the earths were stopped. The view-halloo was given wherever they broke. Flight to Egypt alone could save them, and this they would not take.

Graziani was determined to wrest the initiative from the guerrillas. He reorganized his forces for the last round in the '*guerra senza quartiere*' into small mobile patrols to keep the whole of the forest country under surveillance and to attack the enemy wherever they met him, giving him no rest. To prevent the guerrillas from obtaining supplies and reinforcements from the civilian population he disarmed the tribesmen, confiscating from them thousands of rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition, and made possession of arms a capital offence. He instituted the '*tribunale volante*', a military court flown from point to point to try, and execute, all who had dealings of any kind with the guerrillas. He reduced the Libyan units by more than two-thirds, with the intention of disbanding them altogether later. In the meanwhile he distributed among the 750 Libyans retained in service rifles of a different calibre from rifles in Patriot hands to prevent leakage of ammunition. At the same time he closed the Sanusiya lodges, confiscated their estates, and exiled their Shaikhs to the Island of Ustica. He also much improved the communications of the colony, thereby easing his supply problem and economizing man-power.

*175 *648 *795 727 It may be doubted whether all these measures would have been effective if he had not also started his immense concentration camps for the entire tribal population of Cyrenaica, about whose feelings the General had no illusions. In taking this step the Italians were doing no more than others had done before them and have done after them, for an army fighting guerrillas is fighting an entire population. The first concentrations of January 1930 were found to be too near the area of military operations, for the prisoners, in spite of close surveillance, still managed to supply the guerrillas with some of their requirements;

●[705]

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

so most of the Bedouin were removed to the *barqa al-baida* and the Sirtica. In this bleak country were herded in the smallest camps possible 80,000 men, women, and children, and 600,000 beasts, in the summer of 1930. Hunger, disease, and broken hearts took a heavy toll of the imprisoned population. Bedouin die in a cage. Loss of livestock was also great, for the beasts had insufficient grazing near the camps on which to support life, and the herds, already decimated in the fighting, were almost wiped out by the camps.

The guerrillas thus found themselves cut off from local sources of supply and forced more and more to rely on Egypt for the bare necessities of life and of war. For years a considerable part of their supplies had come from there, paid for by Bedouin produce, money raised by customs charges, and funds collected throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Supplies came through the port of al-Sallum, and the Egyptian Frontiers Administration must have closed its eyes to supplies going into Cyrenaica as tightly as to refugees going out of it. The Marmarica had been declared by the Italians a military zone, its people being removed to concentration camps, and the closed frontier was patrolled by armoured cars and planes with instructions to destroy any caravans they spotted, but, in spite of these precautions, supplies continued to reach the Patriots. Graziani therefore decided to run a line of barbed-wire entanglement from the sea to Jaghbub and into the dunes to the south of it, a distance of over 300 km. The work was completed early in September 1931 and control along the wire was operated through fortified posts, a telephone system, and aviation camps. Perhaps nothing shows more clearly the slow imprisonment of the people of Cyrenaica than the use of barbed wire on an ever-increasing scale to imprison them in concentration camps within their country and to shut them off from the outside world: in 1922–3 the Italians spent only 27,000 Lire on barbed wire in Cyrenaica but by 1930–1 they could boast of spending 14,111,000 Lire.[1]

In spite of all Graziani's energy and threats Sidi 'Umar and his men would neither surrender nor flee the country. In 1930 the bands of the Bara'asa, 'Abid, and Hasa-'Abaidat were still harassing Italian detachments and raiding the herds of those who had submitted. Nevertheless, Italian activities had now

[1] *La Nuova Italia d'Oltremare*, 1933–4, vol. i, p. 239.